

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

March / April 2017



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President's Letter

Dear Friends,



Photo by Millie Phuah

In the blink of an eye, we are into the first quarter of the year. With so many events happening around us, I do feel that time flies when you are having fun.

Some of the most fun I have had during the last two months was when I walked through a virtual rainforest filled with animated animals and plants, in the Glass Rotunda of the National Museum of Singapore. This permanent digital art installation, *Story of the Forest*, brings to life some of the illustrations from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings. I had a great deal of fun 'capturing' the animals I spotted on my mobile phone and learning facts about them. Those of you who are nature lovers may also find the special exhibition, *Singapore, Very Old Tree*, at the base of the Glass Rotunda, thought-provoking. The exhibition features photographs of old trees around Singapore taken by Singaporean photographer Robert Zhao. Some of these trees might evoke poignant memories for you, especially those that had to make way for redevelopment. Do pay these installations a visit if you have not already done so.

Recently, I joined a group of docents from the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) in watching *Pendekar Bujang Lapok*, a movie by the legendary P Ramlee, an icon of Malay films in the 1950s and 1960s. Although we came from different cultural backgrounds, he had us falling out of our seats with laughter. The next time I share his story during a tour at the MHC, I shall relate how his movies and songs transcend the boundaries of language and nationality and are enjoyed by all.

Our activity groups have been busy organising interesting programmes for you to enjoy. Explore Singapore!, for example, is not just a run-of-the-mill tour of local sites, but is designed to allow participants to immerse themselves in the local culture as our volunteers share their knowledge and insights during each visit. Similarly, the Asian Study Groups stretch the research capabilities of their participants to delve into selected topics and share that knowledge with the rest of the group. To join these programmes, please check out the FOM website.

Just as enriching are the popular FOM study tours, the main focus of this issue of *PASSAGE*. Participants not only go on an overseas trip, but are also required to read up on and give short pre-trip talks to the group about the country that they will be visiting. Last year, groups visited China, Laos and India. For this issue, Margaret White wrote about how study tours began. Various trip participants contributed their learning experiences for the article.

Very soon, the trainees who have been preparing to guide at the Asian Civilisations Museum, the National Museum of Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum will be completing their courses. After that, they will be busy practising their tours with their mentors and eventually will lead tours as fully fledged docents. To these trainees, welcome to our docent community. To all the docents who have helped out in one way or another, as trainers or mentors, thank you for contributing your valuable time to our annual docent training programmes.

Although docent training is coming to an end at some of the museums, training at the Indian Heritage Centre began in February. In May, we will have a recruitment drive to enlist a new batch of trainees for the museums we partner. These ongoing training programmes will help us build a core group of docents to support the museums we serve.

Needless to say, FOM's docents are invaluable to our society. So are our activities volunteers, office volunteers and council members. You are priceless and I would like to say, "thank you" for all your generous contributions.

I wish everyone a fun-filled Easter break.

Clara Chan
FOM President 2017

A V&A Museum Experience

By Muhammad Qazim



Creating Innovative Learning Programmes' delegates at the V&A Museum of Childhood. Photo courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

It was a trip of many firsts – one of these was that this was my first time in London. As a recipient of the FOM-NHB grant, I had the opportunity to attend the week-long *Creating Innovative Learning Programmes* training course at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum.

The V&A is one of the world's leading museums of art and design, with a collection of more than 2.3 million objects. Since its establishment in 1852, it has continued to educate and inspire many generations of visitors – I was one of them. The training programme was aligned with my personal objectives, which were to learn new strategies for enhancing visitors' experiences in our museums, to grow museum audiences through educational initiatives and to learn from best practices of our overseas counterparts.

The programme included 19 international delegates from a wide range of museums and cultural institutions. They included the *Karikaturmuseum Krems* (Krems Caricature Museum), Austria, The Migration Museum (Australia) and even the Museum of Estonian Architecture. The delegates had varying areas of expertise – some were senior curators, conservators, museum teachers and also education consultants.

Throughout the course, counterparts from V&A's Learning and Visitor Experience Department shared their key initiatives and offered a preview of the museum's future expansion plans. We also had group discussions covering areas of adult learning and social inclusion, exhibition programming and interpretation strategies for visitors, among others. The V&A's 3.4 million visitors are themselves a key resource for the creation and delivery of an exceptional museum experience.

Understanding Your Target Audience

The V&A conducts monthly surveys and quarterly visitor profiling reports to better understand the visitors' demographic, motivation for their visits and areas of improvement. Results of a recent analysis showed that only 8% of visitors were from lower socio-economic groups (NSEC 5-8).

Working on these findings, the V&A embarked

on initiatives such as *CreatesFutures* to increase the participation of unemployed and disadvantaged youths aged 16 to 24. These youths were given the opportunity to work with professional artists and designers for skills-based workshops such as furniture-making, costume design and video-making. It is hoped that once equipped with new vocational skills, the youths will utilise this knowledge and make a living for themselves. The V&A sees itself as an important platform for preparing the community not only for work in the creative industry, but also to eventually contribute to the nation's economy.

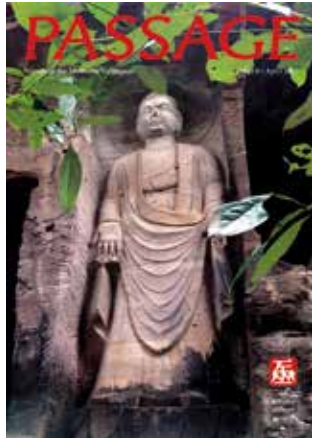
Learning Points

The course allowed my course-mates and me to see the museum in another light. It is not just an educational institution; it is also a gathering space for ideas to evolve. The daily interactions we had added value to the course. Despite coming from different institutions (and continents), we faced similar constraints, one of which was the lack of child-friendly elements in our galleries.

The conversations allowed us to discover new initiatives that I hope to replicate in the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). One of them is the self-guided 'family bag packs'. These bags contain instructions for handling items, when children are encouraged to touch, smell and feel the artefacts on display, providing a truly immersive, sensory experience. We can also consider using such bags for school tours. Another interesting initiative was the use of large-print information boards in the galleries. The availability of such texts will be beneficial for seniors who might find it difficult to read the small captions on the walls.

I am also looking into introducing other initiatives to enhance the MHC experience to make it an even more attractive destination. I would like to thank FOM for making this study trip possible.

Muhammad Qazim is the Assistant Manager for Outreach & Education at the Malay Heritage Centre. His interests lie in enhancing visitors' experience and social media engagement.



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On the Cover: One of the many hundreds of thousands of Buddhist carvings and sculptures in the Yuanjue Caves, Yunju Mountain, Anyue district, Sichuan Province, PRC. Almost hidden behind the overgrown foliage that blocks the openings of these mainly Song Dynasty caves, the base blackened from the many fires that would have once been lit at its base, is a serene, standing Shakyamuni Buddha on a single lotus petal base, his right hand in the *varada mudra*, the gesture of charity (or wish granting). Note the square holes in the cliff face which once would have held wooden supports for roofs covering the opening of the caves. Photo by Patricia Bjaaland Welch.

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

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FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

The Queen of Sheba and Singapore's Sidewalks

By Kavita Issar Batra

Singapore has been home for the past seven years and over the years, has immeasurably enriched my days. The FOM community and becoming a docent at the Singapore Art Museum opened my mind to so much. I had for many years been exploring art-making, mainly pottery and painting. As a docent, my art history and contemporary art education were brushed up and I learned to reflect on and question art practices. My own art-making was developing.

One day while out on my morning walk, my muse metaphorically jumped up and hit me in the face. My gaze was drawn to the dead twigs, leaves, flowers, seeds, bark, insects, reptiles, wires etc on the sidewalk.

I felt a compulsion to give voice to these ignored and trampled-upon wonders through a variety of art-making processes. As in *Arte Povera* (literally 'poor art'), I use overlooked or discarded elements to create icons and invite everyone to look beyond what we see, to explore the conversation between the infinitesimally small and the macrocosm.



5 May 2015. Calligraphy? Gestural drawings? Remains of the day? Eventually, perhaps all that will be left of us as a species will be damp imprints on the ground where we fall. These too will fade when the sun dries the pavement and with it, the memory



14 January 2014. Today I found this leaf with what is like an umbilical cord and it seemed to echo my thoughts about the roles we are given as daughters and mothers. We have been at one end of the physical cord; being sustained ourselves, then sustaining other lives. Somehow, no other relationship has the same depth because even if we later lead separate lives from our mothers and offspring, the psychological ties associated with the cords that once physically bound us, pulse like heartbeats



Ode to the Singapore Sidewalk, 2016, mixed media on canvas



8 April 2016. One, two, three...dive! Another 'as found' on the sidewalk along Bukit Timah Road. A little character, Tintin-like, a sense of trepidation? Should he take the plunge? A cliff-hanger, a story in the making to interpret as you will. So many possibilities, such as we often face in life, choices to make and consequences to live with

My journey started with photography. I recorded what I found on sidewalks and incorporated them into paintings, monotypes or installations, then shared the photographs, along with the musings they inspired, with friends and



30 November 2015. How wonderfully versatile these petals are, from protective baby blankets when the flower is in bud, they unfurl and fling themselves open to reveal their full glory. Falling, they gently curl and cocoon, creating a shroud for themselves

on social media through the *Morning Walk Montage Series*. This began over four years ago. My walks are occasions for conversation, reflection and mindfulness. The sidewalks have been classrooms for composition, texture, colour, philosophy, botany, chemistry, metaphysics, patterns in the macro and microcosm and so much more.

When something catches my eye, I photograph it. The montages are either set against artwork in progress

or as found on sidewalks and roads, whose surfaces intrigue me. The 'life journey' of each leaf, flower etc is unique, a testament to time, the elements and also to their essence, something intangible making each one different.

When I was a child growing up in the Himalayas in India, the only way to get around was by walking and to keep me amused, my mother would be the Queen of Sheba sending me to do her bidding – fetch three leaves, a grey stone and so on. While working on a compilation of the montages for a book, this memory came back to me and I felt that perhaps in my mind's recesses, my fascination for detritus stems from those long-forgotten childhood games.

Here are some montages I've done over the past few years to share with you.

In my paintings, I do not recreate the bits I see or collect; I respond to the colours, textures and express the emotions they evoke, a visual account of my experience. My creative process is spontaneous, responding to the various materials and their interactions, with no fixed



Photo of the painting All that Glisters is not Gold II, mixed media on mounted canvas

outcome in mind. I use layering to build up colour and texture, but also reveal layers and erosion, much as nature does when wind, air and water interact, allowing time and the elements to play their part.

You can access Kavita's daily musings and montages in the *Morning Walk Montage Series* on Facebook or on Instagram, morning_walk_montage_series. Her book, *Of Time, the Elements and their Essence*, is available at Supermama@SAM. A selection of the montages taken in the Singapore Botanic Gardens will be on display in The People's Gallery at the gardens' three entrances from 10 March.

Kavita Issar Batra is a Singapore Art Museum docent who studied art in both London and Singapore. Her oeuvre spans oil, acrylic, mixed-media paintings, installations and photography. Her work is in collections in Singapore, Australia, the US, the UK, Dubai, the Philippines, India and Europe.

Postcards with a Brush

By Siobhán Cool

For two centuries, people have enjoyed collecting and sending postcards from their travels: sharing famous landmarks, domestic views and quirky images from big cities, small villages, rural pockets and beauty spots. Travelling for leisure or work, I always take my pad and pen to 'snap' the view as a keepsake.



Early morning at the gateway to Ngac San Temple, Hanoi



Noodle shop, Hillier Street, Hong Kong Island



Summer view over rooftops, East Melbourne



Beach chairs, Maldives

Siobhán Cool lives in Singapore with her family and steals away when she can, to sketch passing scenes and Singapore moments.

Wildlife in an Urban Jungle

Pasir Ris Park

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



The Red Junglefowl is the wild ancestor of the domesticated chicken



A sleepy Oriental Pied Hornbill dozes off in the foliage



A Paradise Tree Snake makes a meal of a lizard



The Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo is a species of cuckoo that closely resembles the drongo

Singapore, despite its glitzy urban appearance, is home to an incredible array of wildlife. The island's rich biodiversity can be observed in the four nature reserves as well as the numerous parks across the city.

One such nature hotspot is the Pasir Ris Park, in the northeastern part of Singapore. This beach park includes a 15-acre mangrove forest, which can be easily explored via a winding boardwalk. Here's a look at some of the avian and reptilian residents of Pasir Ris Park.

Anne Pinto-Rodrigues is a nature enthusiast, who writes about her various wildlife experiences on her blog *No Roads Barred* (www.noroadbarred.wordpress.com).

All photos by the author



The striking Black Baza is a small-sized bird of prey



It's yoga time for this Grey Heron



A Malayan Water Monitor basks high up on a tree



A rarely seen Black-crowned Night Heron

Lithography Stones and Creating Art

By Florence Martellini

Lithography stones seem to hold a special power, at least for visual artists. Robert Rauschenberg compared their surfaces to the skin, found them sensual, “sexy” objects to draw on, to experiment with. Jasper Johns called them “gorgeous”. Josef Albers showed a tremendous perseverance for his print series *the white line squares*; it took him 11 months to produce after years of planning with renowned American master printer Ken Tyler. The result was a degree of registration and colour accuracy unknown in the field of lithography until 1966.

Tyler, the technical inspiration for Singapore’s STPI Creative Workshop, was hunting hard for these treasured stones. On one occasion, while a student on a meagre budget, he was determined to bring a 52-inch square, grey stone back to his printing workshop from an old building site. His old and feeble Volkswagen did not like the trip ... even less when it had to carry a second stone after the first one’s corner was chipped during transport. Tyler wanted them perfect, like precious stones.

What became of these darlings? Rauschenberg used them in 1967 to produce *Booster*, a groundbreaking print. Its huge size required the two stones to be placed in the press one after the other, creating the largest lithograph ever published by a fine arts press. This masterpiece pushed the limit of papermaking itself. Scale seemed limitless because Tyler was always accommodating the artists he worked with. In 1965 and again in 1967, he developed motor-driven, flat-bed lithography printing presses, which historically represented important innovations. You can see these beautiful pieces of engineering at STPI. Later, when Tyler had more means, he collected lithography stones used by other printing shops, often with commercial rather than artistic content. He acquired them simply for their beauty. STPI has a collection of 200, including some with drawings by David Hockney and Helen Frankenthaler.

Lithography stones feel smooth to the touch, but that is not the only reason why they are special: the best are made of limestone from Solnhofen and Kelheim, in Germany, so they are rare. The quarries are still active although production is



STPI’s chief printer and project leader Eitaro Ogawa processing the drawn image on limestone

limited to demand from fine artists. Fortunately, they can be recycled, re-used. How? Simply by grinding them for days with carborundum powder until the old drawing is entirely erased. The surface of the stone must be smooth and perfectly flat to become the base for a new drawing. Stones vary in hardness, colour and imperfections, but they have one thing in common: they are heavy, very heavy, as Tyler’s old Volkswagen discovered. The yellow or whitish stones are soft, while the grey and blue-grey ones tend to be harder.

A relatively young printing process, lithography was discovered in 1787 by the German playwright Alois Senefelder as he was writing a laundry list for his mother on a limestone tablet. Later he etched and inked the stone and printed without much success. However, when he washed it with soap and water he had his ‘Eureka’ moment ... lithography was born. How does it work? Once the image is drawn on a stone or metal surface with an oil-based material, the printer enables the stone to print. The inked and uninked areas are not physically separated as in other printing processes; instead, a chemical reaction does the job. “Oil and water do not mix”, that is the technical motto. But beware, a mark cannot be removed without affecting the surface. Limestones are porous.

Commercial considerations and technological progress have expanded the lithography process onto aluminium plates. Are limestone’s days coming to an end? Well, not really. Many artists such as Ryan Gander, who dedicated a print series to the history of lithography stones during his STPI residency, still value their intrinsic nature. They trigger feelings and emotions that man-made metal plates cannot replicate.



Japanese artist Shinro Ohtake drawing on limestone in the Artist Studio at STPI

A docent at STPI and NGS, Florence Martellini experiences a lot of joy exploring human beings’ relationship with the world through visual art.

Images courtesy of STPI

Rubin Museum of Art, New York City

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues

Since time immemorial, the Himalayas have attracted writers, painters, climbers, seekers and all kinds of mystics. Not surprising then, that right in the heart of Chelsea, one of New York City's main art hubs, sits an entire museum dedicated to preserving and promoting the artistic traditions of the Himalayan region. The Rubin Museum of Art has a permanent collection of over 2,500 paintings, sculptures and textiles from the Tibetan plateau as well as neighboring areas in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia and China. While the private Himalayan art collection of Donald and Shelly Rubin forms the core of the permanent collection, the museum is now a non-profit, public museum. The permanent collection is displayed in two of the six gallery floors of the museum.

Donald and Shelly Rubin purchased their first art piece in the mid-1970s. Walking along Madison Avenue, they were smitten by an 18th century Tibetan painting of White Tara (referred to as the mother of all Buddhas), displayed in an art dealer's window. \$1,500 later, not only were they the owners of this magnificent Buddhist painting, but it also led to the start of one of the largest private collections of Himalayan art in the world today. In 1998, the Rubins purchased a building housing a section of the luxury department store, Barneys New York, and repurposed it as a museum. The original, six-storey spiral staircase forms the centre of the building around which the galleries are ranged. Inaugurated in October 2004, the Rubin Museum is today the only museum in the United States that is focused on the Himalayan region.



The original, six-storey spiral staircase of the Rubin Museum. Photo by Peter Aaron Esto, courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art

With a sanctuary-like ambience, the Rubin Museum transports visitors to a realm very different from that of the busy city outside. 'The Gateway to Himalayan Art' is one of its two permanent exhibitions. It focusses on the foundational concepts used in Buddhist and Hindu Himalayan art such as gaining merit or ritual practices, and details the steps involved in the making of artistic traditions such as the *thangka* (Tibetan scroll



A recreation of the Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room at the Rubin Museum. Photo by David de Armas, courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art

painting) or a *mandala* (a geometric representation of the universe), among others.

The other exhibition derived from the permanent collection is 'Masterworks of Himalayan Art'. The theme of this exhibition changes each year and a complementary set of objects are displayed in each iteration. The objects in this exhibition highlight the distinguishing features seen in the regional artistic traditions of the various Himalayan geographies, over a period of one millennium (8th - 20th century).

One of the highlights of the museum is the recreation of a Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room. This oasis of serenity offers the visitor a space for contemplation and meditation, in the midst of a typical New York day.

Usually, the museum also has 3-4 temporary exhibitions that are in sync with the museum's overarching theme. Guided tours of 45-minute duration are conducted at 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm every day. The tours are free with admission.

The immersive experience at the Rubin Museum is incomplete without a visit to the museum's café. Listed as one of the seven best museum restaurants in New York City, Café Serai's menu is inspired by the cuisines of the Himalayan kingdoms. From *momos* (dumplings) to *frankies* (Indian wraps) to custom tea blends, Café Serai celebrates the flavours of the East. A visit to the Rubin Museum is a treat for both the soul and the palate.



The exterior of the Rubin Museum of Art. Photo by the author

On her last visit to New York City, **Anne Pinto-Rodrigues** spent a day at the Rubin Museum, captivated by its rich Himalayan collection.

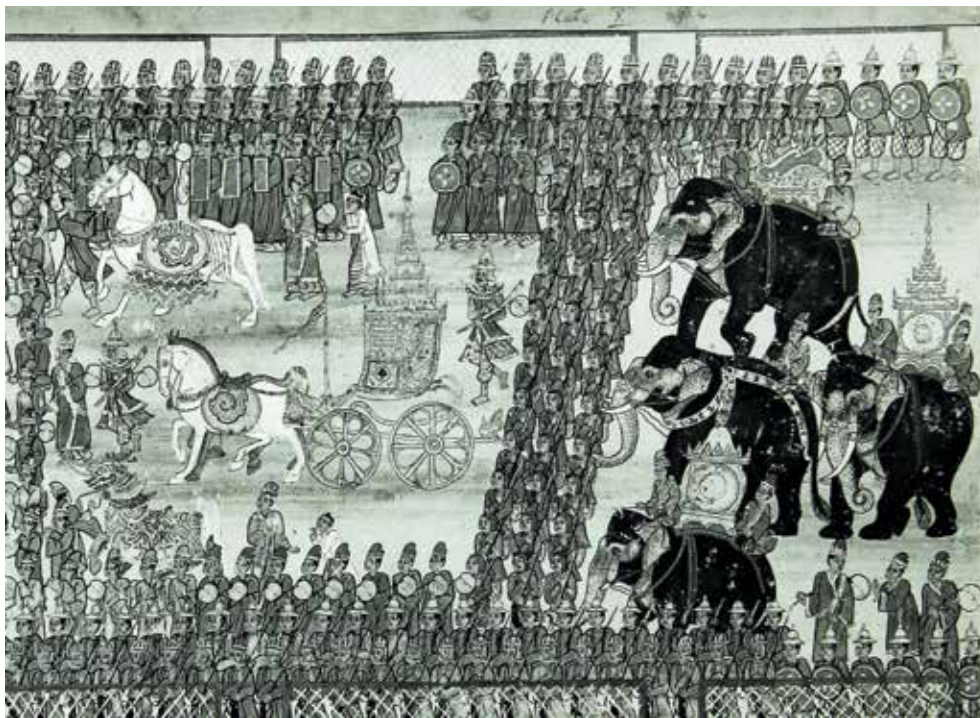
Myanmar Manuscripts Kammavaca and Parabaiik

By Marie McBride

Thousands of years before the Chinese invented paper, Egypt used papyrus (from which the word paper is derived), Rome used vellum and Asia and Southeast Asia used palm leaves. In Myanmar (aka Burma), as in other countries, two types of palm leaves were used – the palmyra, which yields thick and rigid leaves, and the talipot, which has thin and flexible leaves. Manuscripts created from the talipot palm can last more than 600 years while paper may last a mere 150. In Myanmar, both types of palm leaves were used to make books, manuscripts and general petitions.

A Venetian merchant, Cesare Federici, visited a Mon King in 1566 and witnessed people bringing their petitions to the king on palmyra leaves incised with a stylus. During times of unrest in Myanmar, manuscripts were hidden in caves or inside statues of the Buddha. In the 13th century, religious fervour was very high and many donors wanted to gain merit by having manuscripts of Pali works composed by monks (the palm leaves were prepared by slaves). By the 18th century, cloth was used, including the cloth of monks' robes or kings' robes. Palm leaves usually allowed four lines of script while cloth permitted six to eight. Both palm and cloth leaves were lacquered to make manuscripts called *kammavaca*.

Kamma means law and *vaca* is to speak aloud. The *kammavaca* are rules laid down by the Buddha in the *Vinaya Pitaka*. During ordinations, funeral rites and other ceremonies, monks recite the *kammavaca*. Parents commission one for a son's ordination into a monastery. Typically, *kammavaca* (also *kammaava*) are made with 16 folios



Mid 19th century parabaiik titled Pageant of King Mindon, from *The Making of a Collection: Burmese Manuscripts*, by Patricia Herbert

and a top and bottom cover. The wooden cover may have a putty substance applied and then cut back to reveal various motifs. The putty material, *thayo*, is a mixture of ash, sawdust and lacquer. Other materials such as ivory have been used to make *kammavaca* although ivory is slippery and not ideal.

The script style (in Pali) written on the folios of the *kammavaca* is called 'tamarind seed' because the script's characters resemble the blackish, rounded squares of tamarind seeds (not the pods). The script is written using oxidised lacquer. Noel F Singer writes that "An inscription of 1273 CE states that this temple cost 2,300 ticals of silver; and 3,000 ticals of silver for a set of the *Tripitaka* (the Pali Buddhist canon) ...while an acre of land at that time cost only ONE tical!" This gives us an idea of the amounts the wealthy were prepared to pay in order to make merit.

Mon palm-leaf manuscripts were often made with a silver-leaf background, were stylus-incised and with black writing. Whether palm-leaf or cloth, gilded or silvered, these *kammavaca* were stored in lacquered manuscript boxes on stands or legs, to keep them safe from water and vermin. Both were often treated with citronella oil or lemongrass oil to deter insects.

In the 14th century folded paper books were introduced to the art world by the Shans. In Myanmar, mulberry-pulp paper manuscripts called *parabaiik* (also *parabeik*) form curious-looking, accordion-style books. The boiled pulp



Tamarind seeds



Kammavaca



19th century European-influenced, coloured parabaik of a rice festival

of the mulberry tree provided the medium to make the paper for these concertina manuscripts, which did not require a coating of lacquer, although the edges were often coated with lacquer and/or gilded. Some *parabaik* are 30 metres long. The style of edge-coating denoted the owner's status: royalty and monks had all four edges gilded while commoners' pieces had a carbon-coating or plain edges. Officials' *parabaiks* had a band of vermilion coated on the central gilded edges.

Patricia Herbert's *The Making of a Collection: The Burmese Manuscripts in the British Library*, tells of the burning of rubbish inside the Mandalay Palace when it was occupied by British forces in the third Anglo-Burmese war. Thousands of *parabaik* were lying in heaps. A Burmese scholar, U Tin, and a court servant saved so many that they needed 40 bullock carts to haul them away. Some of these *parabaik* are in the British Library today.

When Sir Arthur Phayre was tasked with writing the history of Burma in English, one of his first acts was to consult the then ruler, King Mindon gave him a copy of the Burmese chronicles on palm leaf. As he handed it to him he advised, "Read them carefully and let them enter your heart... you will gather thence...the futility of strife and anger." Herbert's work provides many details of the provenance of many *parabaik* and *kammavaca* of palm, cloth, ivory, and even gold.

Manuscripts were collected not only by British soldiers and administrators, but also by Christian missionaries and Burmese scholars. In their quest for scholarship and education, the Burmese royal family and government officials commissioned numerous manuscripts that were preserved in the Mandalay Palace and thankfully, saved in the India Office Library before entering the British Library collection. In fact, according to Herbert, the "great glory of the British Library's Burma collection" is the illustrated *parabaik*. She says that the finest example of Burmese manuscript art *before* it became influenced by European artistic styles is the *Pageant of King Mindon* manuscript, which was purchased from a London bookseller for six guineas in 1951.

Many *parabaik* are illustrated with the *Jataka* stories (relating the lives of the Buddha). When Western artists visited Myanmar in the 19th century, their paint pigments gained favour among Burmese artists. The *parabaik* began to be illuminated with western-style shading, perspective

and a myriad of colours previously not used in Myanmar. *Parabaik* with scenes of cosmology, festivals, rice festivals, royal barges and boats, scenes of military horsemanship were collected by Henry Burney, a British resident in Burma. A hundred and forty years after his death, his family donated the *parabaik* collection to the British collection. Because Burney's collection spanned both the 18th and 19th centuries, these *parabaik* are of unique significance in the study of the progression of Burmese manuscript painting. We can easily see this for ourselves by comparing the *parabaik* of the *Pageant of King Mindon* to a western-style painted *parabaik* of the 19th century, currently exhibited in the Asian Civilisations Museum's *Myanmar: Cities and Kings* exhibition.

Many *parabaik* were used to record architectural plans, boundary limits for where monks' ordinations could take place, official documents and government plans etc. Usually these were drawn using a white steatite (soapstone) stylus on a black *parabaik*. Black *parabaik* are similar to 19th century schoolroom blackboards because the *parabaik* could be wiped clean and written upon again. These were also made of boiled mulberry-tree pulp, then treated with rice starch and charcoal to make them black.

Parabaik also chronicled the history, culture, festivals, weddings, Buddhism and the daily life of the country's people. Those painted in the 19th century have an illumination quality unique to Myanmar manuscripts. The artists, borrowing from European artists who visited Burma, used the same pigments and techniques of perspective, shadowing and realistically rendered human forms. This was at a time when the 'cult of the picturesque' was popular in England and was introduced to Burma. Although papermaking is not one of the original 'Ten Flowers' of Myanmar's crafts, it continues today and tourists and locals can buy mulberry-paper sheets and mulberry-paper umbrellas.

Marie McBride is a retired scientist from upstate New York. Her volunteer work includes guiding at the ACM teaching English, and donating her Chinese watercolours to various charities in the USA and Asia.

Apart from the B/W image, all photos by Gisella Harrold

FOM Study Tours How it All Began

By Margaret White

Study tours were first offered as regular programmes by the Friends in 1979, not long after FOM's founding. The inaugural study tour was to Malacca, led by Pheng Tan. Pheng's Peranakan heritage meant she had contacts with families in Malacca, especially Charles Chua, who hosted a special *tok panjang* (lavish spread of food) for the group. Pheng recalls that some of the families they visited were very strict about what the group was permitted to do in their homes, for example, no photography and definitely no publication of details of their visits. Pheng says the study tours were "original research" for everyone and that even she learnt things. Eventually, in liaison with the Friends, Pheng and Mrs Eng-Lee (Seok Chee) a senior curator at the National Museum, convinced the museum to set aside a gallery for a Peranakan exhibit.

Soon FOM travellers began to venture farther afield, to Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. FOM tours were meant to be something completely different from what you might 'buy' from a travel agent. They were custom-tailored and participants visited areas not usually on commercial travel lists. It seemed there was no corner in Asia that was not a potential study tour destination. The more off-the-beaten-track a destination was, the more an intrepid FOM'er was prepared to go there, followed by those with an equally adventurous spirit. To date, more than 150 study tours have taken place.

Some of the earliest ground-breaking, unique tours – especially along the Silk Road – were led by Maura Rinaldi. The group journeyed all the way to Pakistan and briefly even into Afghanistan. Laxmi Kripalani remembers that the first tour to China in 1982 included the Buddhist caves, with no toilets of any kind along the route...so the next group was advised to pack sarongs to use as 'modesty shields'. Maura



Cambodia with Kim Saunders, Phnom Chisor Temple, Takeo Province, 2003, photo by the author



Cambodia 2003 dinner, photo courtesy of the author

was also responsible for an early ceramics-based tour of China that visited provincial museums. She later authored a definitive book on *Kraak* porcelain.

Jan Thompson relates that her first study tour was to the north coast of Java in April 1991, with the focus on *batik* and *jamu*. Jan said she had no real knowledge of the complicated techniques or variety of designs associated with *batik* or their cultural significance. For her it was a glimpse into the fascinating world of Southeast Asian textiles, which developed into a life-long interest. Jan's second tour was to the Minangkabau region of Sumatra, memorable not least because of the mild earthquake experienced one evening, while they were sipping gin and tonics.

Jean Miller's first study tour (in 1991 or 1992), was to the Lesser Sunda islands of Indonesia. Participants sailed on a small boat with, I am told, a good-looking guide named Etienne. By day, the travellers explored the islands, then slept on the boat at night. The focus of this tour was textiles and Jean subsequently presented a Monday Morning Lecture, using slides from fellow traveller and photographer, Michelle Tan.

There has always been an educational aspect to FOM's study tours, which I believe enhances them and underlines why they are so special. Jean remembers that in preparation for a tour, participants would meet several times to familiarise everyone with the culture and customs of the destination. Participants presented study papers on specific subjects, which meant they were always well-informed



Author and Charon Campbell at the Bayon Temple, photo courtesy of the author



Bhutan with Mary Connors, 1999, photo by Mary Connors



Java trip 1994, photo by Jan Thompson



Minangkabau wedding, Sumatra 1994, photo by Jan Thompson

before leaving Singapore. It also gave people a chance to get to know one another. In the era before digital cameras, returning travellers would convene to peruse one another's photos and select any they wanted. Of course, there were hundreds of photos and it was quite a lengthy procedure. One had to go to a photo lab to get the prints, which were then sent to the relevant person.

One other requirement of early tours was that participants should 'give back' to FOM by making a presentation and also by displaying artefacts from their journey upon return. This sharing of travellers' tales, whether through special presentations, in the newsletters or at public lectures, was fundamental to how FOM enlarged its pool of knowledge and made it available to all. Throughout the 1980s, FOM members' programmes would highlight one tour per year by holding a themed lunch. There would be a one-hour slide show about the tour presented by three members of the tour group. Each speaker would focus on a different aspect of the tour. These occasions were very popular as social as well as learning events for members. I remember attending several in the early 1990s and they piqued my interest in joining a tour.

Mary Connors vividly remembers the first two tours she participated in – the January 1991 tour to Thailand and the November 1991 tour to Laos led by Rosemary Kroiter. Both these tours were groundbreaking; FOM was the first large group of foreigners (and all women) to enter Laos. In November, her tour coincided with the UN peacekeeping troops entering Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Mary says that Rosemary's organisational skills and passion for the areas visited laid the groundwork for her own interest, not just in going on FOM tours, but leading them herself.

In 1993, Mary organised and led a 15-day tour of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces in China. FOM members were treated like royalty in those not-yet-discovered regions of China. Mary led tours to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia as well as Sri Lanka and India, but says that her most popular tours were to the mountain kingdom of Bhutan. Her most

memorable tour there was in 1999 when the goal was to visit Bumthang in eastern Bhutan for the Jambay Llakhay and Prakar Tsechu festivals. Unfortunately, a huge storm the day they were due to fly created havoc, knocking out bridges and much of the electricity grid in eastern Bhutan.

In the mid-1990s, Angkor in Cambodia became popular as it was finally possible to travel there safely. Tours were offered for three years in a row. Sue Sismondo and her husband can recall the distant sound of exploding mines, which were being cleared from around various temples. My first study tour was also to Cambodia in 1998 and I distinctly remember being told to stay on the 'safe' paths by a French lieutenant as mines were still being cleared around the Banteay Srei Temple. The rough road to the temple was long and torturous and we were only informed on our return drive that it had just been reopened after two years because previously a couple had been ambushed.

However, I was hooked and signed up for many journeys with Study Tours. I love the learning aspect and the wonderful camaraderie among the participants. Inevitably, keen members reunite for tours and I have made many firm friends. These sentiments are shared by all with whom I have communicated. I even persuaded my husband, who had vowed he would never go on a group tour, to accompany me to Bhutan in 2001. He became a convert who has now joined seven tours.



Indonesia 1992, photo by Jean Miller

Mary soon had me joining the Study Tour Committee then leading a tour to Bhutan in 2003, and later, hosting a successful evening at SAM, following the format of the 1980s. We can also credit Mary with developing guidelines for tour leaders in the early 1990s, after 'a sink or swim' experience when leading a group to Sri Lanka. It was evident that there was a lot more to leading a study tour than just getting people on and off buses. The procedures for study tours evolved with the experience gained and have been invaluable guides to other leaders.

Margaret wishes to gratefully acknowledge the reminiscences of Mary Connors, Sue Ellen Kelso, Aditi Krishnakumar, Jean Miller, Sue Sismondo, Pheng Tan and Jan Thompson.



Angkor trip with Patricia Mooney 1998, photo by the author

Margaret White, former FOM president and 'study tour junkie' served on the Study Tour Committee for ten years, was coordinator for two years and has participated in 18 tours to date.

A Trip for the Senses: the Coromandel Coast of India

By Tan Yew Cheng



Mahabalipuram's five rathas - chariot shapes carved out of single massive rocks

In late January 2016, under the able leadership of Abha Kaul and tour advisor Pia Rampal, 25 Friends of the Museums travellers embarked on a 10-day trip from Chennai, down the Coromandel Coast of Tamil Nadu, India. We saw amazing sights: ancient monuments that were 'living' (still in use) temples with towering *gopurams* (entrance gates) attracting throngs of devotees; pastel-painted heritage houses built in the French architectural style and adapted to the local Tamil building ethos; grand old Chettiar mansions supported by majestic Burmese teak pillars; and a utopian other-worldly community called Auroville. The myriad sights, sounds and smells form a gorgeous kaleidoscope of memories that "in vacant or in pensive mood, flashed upon the inward eye", bringing a smile to the face and a sparkle to the eye.

We started with the UNESCO World Heritage Site of monolithic, rock-cut temples in Mahabalipuram. The group of five chariot-shaped temples was carved out of single, massive rocks during the Pallava dynasty of the sixth to tenth

centuries. A pathway past a colossal boulder intriguingly named 'Krishna's Butter Ball' led to the largest open-air rock bas-relief in the world, known as *Descent of the Ganges* or *Arjuna's Penance*. This giant relief, carved on two huge adjacent boulders, is truly a sight to behold – 80 feet long and 20 feet high – it depicts hundreds of Hindu deities. The 'Descent' tells the story of Arjuna's self-mortification so as to obtain a powerful divine weapon from Shiva. The artist's sense of humour is revealed in the carving of a cat mimicking Arjuna's penance to an audience of mice. Next was the Shore Temple seen in the lovely glow of the setting sun. Built on the seaside in the eighth century during the height of the Pallava dynasty's power, it consists of stone towers with five levels incorporating shrines to Shiva, Parvati, Skanda and Nandi.

Our next stop was Kanchipuram, an important religious site for Jainism and Buddhism and once the capital city of the Pallava dynasty. We visited three temples: first the Kailashanatha, which was completed in 705 CE and later became a model for other temples in South India. The

complex consists of the *gopuram*, *mandapa* (main assembly hall), *antarala* (inner enclosure) and the *garbagriha* (sanctum) and features fascinating stone sculptures in multiple shrines of gods and goddesses. Next was the Sri Ekambareswara Temple with its *raja gopuram*, one of the tallest in South India. This 'living' temple came into view via a narrow, bustling street of vendors and devotees bringing offerings. Its long hallway has a thousand pillars built by the Vijayanagar kings. The third temple, Varadaraja Perumal, built by the Chola kings in the 11th century, features intricately carved granite pillars showing Vishnu in different forms. Kanchipuram is famous for its silk saris, a craft that began in the tenth century when King Raja Raja Chola invited



FOM travellers with the dazzling Matrimandir behind them



Arjuna's Penance, a huge relief carved into two adjacent rocks



Inside the ceremonial hall of a Chettinad mansion

silk weavers to settle there. We went sari shopping and also visited a silk-weaving centre.

Next came Pondicherry, a former French colony with many heritage homes. In an ashram here we participated in an evening meditation. We also visited Auroville, a community founded in 1968 by Sri Aurobindo (born Aravind Ghose), an Indian freedom fighter, poet, philosopher and yogi, and his associate, a revered Frenchwoman affectionately called "the Mother". The community's teachings include the cultivation of a divine consciousness to attain human unity. What stood out in Auroville was the transformation of what had been arid land into green forests of tall trees, through the use of innovative water management techniques. There was also a rather incongruous structure standing in the plains, the *Matrimandir*, ('Temple of the Mother' in Sanskrit), a huge, dazzling, gold-clad globe.

We also visited Chidambaram Temple, another ancient living temple built by the Chola kings, in the town that bears its name. Some of it is thought to be more than 3,500 years old. Chidambaram is believed to be the earthly home of Shiva and the sacred place where he performed the cosmic dance. The Chola period is known for its bronze sculptures and the *Nataraja* (Lord of the Dance) is its most famous representation. Highly colourful *gopurams* were decorated with the 108 poses of Shiva's dance, a recurring motif throughout the temple.



A gopuram at Chidambaram Temple

A visit to a bronze workshop to learn about the Cholas' 'Lost Wax Method' of producing bronze statues preceded our visit to Airavateshwara Temple, a monument built in the 12th century by the Chola king Rajaraja Chola II. In the late afternoon glow of the setting sun, the temple complex looked surreal with its exquisitely carved pillars, walls and ceilings.

Not to be missed was Thanjavur's huge temple, the Brihadeshwara, built in the early 11th century by the first Chola king Rajaraja I, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Constructed entirely of granite, at 66 metres the majestic temple has the tallest *vimana* (tower) in the world. Its unique

decorations include *nartakis* (dancers) in 81 of the 108 *karanas* (the synchronised movements of hands and feet) used in the Bharata Natyam traditional dance. The nearby Tanjore Palace Museum houses the best collection of Chola Nataraja bronzes and stone sculptures in the country.

En route to Karaikudi in rural Chettinad, we came upon a lovely Ayyanar temple, humble in contrast to the grandiose Pallava and Chola temples. The road to an open-air shrine was lined with rows and rows of terracotta horses, offerings to the village god Ayyanar for his travels at night.

In Chettinad, we stayed at the Bangala, a heritage hotel famous for its Chettinad cuisine and run by a local Chettiar lady, Mrs Meenakshi Meyyappan. While there, we toured the grand old mansions built by the Chettiars, merchants and traders who later expanded into banking and moneylending. Many of these mansions were in varying degrees of disrepair and decay. The cavernous halls lined with huge mirrors from Europe and teak pillars from Burma bore silent witness to social and family celebrations from a bygone era.

Our final stop was Madurai and the living Meenakshi Temple where the goddess Meenakshi (meaning fish-eyed) is the principal deity. The massive temple complex was initially built in the 12th century during the Pandyan dynasty. The later Nayak kings who ruled Madurai between the 16th and 18th centuries were chiefly responsible for the splendour of the temple today. It covers 14 acres and has four large *gopurams* at the four cardinal points and eight smaller ones inside. The most famous and tallest *gopuram*, the south gate, rises to over 170 feet (52 metres). Each *gopuram* is a multi-storeyed structure with thousands of stone figures of gods, demons and animals, carved layer upon layer in bright hues of blue, red, green and all shades in-between. Meenakshi is an avatar of the Hindu goddess Parvati. We encountered throngs of friendly devotees in their brightly coloured saris bringing offerings to the goddess. The lighted candles, the sounds of worship and the sight of the devotees generated a palpable festive air throughout the temple.

Back in Chennai, we visited the San Thome Basilica, a white, gothic-style church allegedly built over the tomb of the Christian apostle St Thomas (of Doubting Thomas fame). The trip ended with a sumptuous dinner at the Amethyst Café, conveniently located below elegant fashion stores, allowing us to combine two favourite activities, food and shopping. FOM study tours are wonderful, with warm friendships and fascinating discoveries of antiquity, art and culture.

When not travelling or working, **Yew Cheng** likes to read, go for brisk walks and meet up with friends over a good meal.

Photos by Lynn Baker

Good Intentions Hijacked by Pandas

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

The plan was a study tour to the ancient Chinese kingdom known as *Shu* (modern-day Sichuan), with an itinerary that was very *rojak* – a diverse mixture of ingredients that when jumbled together makes a tasty meal – a bit of ancient and medieval history, a touch of Buddhism, a classic Chinese hero's burial place, spiced up with some contemporary art and a dash of World War II sites. But pandas quickly became the *pièce de résistance*.

On 3 June, our group of 16 veteran FOM travellers alighted in Chengdu with maps and backpacks, checked into the Ritz-Carlton and acculturated ourselves over a local Sichuanese dinner. The next morning at the Chengdu Yongling Mausoleum and Museum (the burial site of the *Shu* kingdom's founder, Wang Jian, 847-918), we compared its 24 stone carvings of Tang dynasty musicians and dancers with the figures on the gold cup in ACM's Tang Shipwreck exhibition.

Next was the Sichuan Museum to see first-hand the carved Han dynasty tomb tiles, excavated around Chengdu and showing some of the earliest Chinese figurative art, pre-dating any extant drawings and paintings on silk (and later, paper). The day concluded with a visit to a buzzing



Tentatively identified by scholars are two of the Three Worthies of the Huayan School — on the left, Samantabhadra (Puxian) and on the right holding the stupa, Manjushri (Wenchu), and 8.2 metres high including the base, surrounded by 81 smaller Buddhas in roundels. The missing Buddha from the photo is Vairocana, who was to their right. Baodingshan, Sichuan Province, PRC



Group member feeding a panda

gallery thronging with Chinese visitors who had come to see works by the modern Chinese artist Chang Dai-Chien or Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). "The Enigmatic Genius" is famous not only for his own works, but also because he was one of the greatest art forgers of his time. (ACM exhibited some of his works in 2001.)

Despite some trepidation that the evening's entertainment wouldn't live up to its reputation, we trundled off good-naturedly to a performance of Sichuan's famous 'face-changing' *tour de force*. Some individuals were even tempted by the invitation to go

backstage to be made up, to the delight of their friends in the audience, but most of us roamed around the souvenir stands or sipped tea waiting for the show to begin – and it did its reputation justice.

Few would guess the steps to which foreign visitors who want to get close to a panda in China have to go through – and it's not just the large fee (due in USD payable at the time of booking, weeks before arrival). Those who pre-registered and paid, also had to submit a very official-looking 'Physical Examination Record for Foreigner' form that would have put any US military induction centre to shame. There is no way anyone is going to give one of Chengdu's pandas in the research centre so much as a sniffle. Those who wanted the privilege of entering a panda cage to rake up panda droppings and help chop up the 20-40 pounds of bamboo these 200-pounders eat, first had to answer a series of questions querying whether they had previously experienced 12 diseases, ranging from undesignated 'infections' to 'hallucinatory psychosis' before completing a physical examination that included a chest x-ray and an HIV/syphilis test.

Arrival at the Panda Breeding Base was sheer pandemonium as busloads of frantic would-be panda-tenders, all waving their health forms, ran to be first in line. Half our group disappeared into the prep room while the rest of us took off along the footpaths that link the various panda-viewing areas. We snapped hundreds of photos and selfies with pandas walking, sleeping, eating, watching us, eating, sleeping.... It was a beautiful sunny day; the pandas were out doing their best to entertain us, but where were our panda-tenders? Finally we spotted them – hot, dusty, but clearly in panda heaven and with the T-shirts and certificates to prove it.

Still high from our morning with the pandas, we arrived late afternoon at the ancient Dujiangyan Irrigation System (a UNESCO site since 2000). This was first constructed by the local governor of the *Shu* kingdom (Li Bing) and his son in



Our FOM Study Tour group waiting for the ferry that will take us to the ancient Dujiangyan Irrigation System. As usual, our group was a centre of attention as so few foreign visitors visit this area of Sichuan despite its many fascinating sites



A majestic reclining Buddha in parinirvana is surrounded by disciples and worshippers. Our FOM group were the only visitors at the site

256 BCE, and represents one of China's highest achievements in water management and technology. This ancient system has been supplying water to the vast Chengdu plains and farmlands for over 2,000 years as well as preventing the flooding of the Minjiang River. It's not a dam but a system of levees or embankments that allows the water to flow through more naturally. A statue of Li Bing was placed in the river to monitor the water flow – when the level rose above his shoulders it indicated flood, and when it fell beneath his calves, it indicated drought. Beautiful views, beautiful smiles on all our faces.

Day four we reluctantly checked out of our own paradise (the Ritz-Carlton) in search of the Buddhist paradise portrayed at the spectacular UNESCO World Heritage



This Wheel of Reincarnation at Baodingshan is unique in China as it constitutes, writes Angela Howard, "the foundations for the understanding and practice of Buddhism". Mara, Lord of Desire and Death, sits clutching a giant wheel representing the constant sequence of cause and result. At its hub, is a Buddha from whom six rays of light containing Buddhas in roundels radiate. The three Buddhas above Mara represent past, present and future Buddhas

Site of Dazu, in Baodingshan, Anyue County. Baodingshan's sculptural reliefs from the 12th to 13th century incorporate Pure Land, Huayan, Chan and esoteric Buddhist teachings and were especially rich in *mandalas*, depictions of wrathful deities and Buddhist allegories. We spent two days in Dazu exploring the Anyue rock carvings. FOM groups often find themselves off the beaten track and once again we were the sole visitors to a site that inspired hundreds of selfies as we pushed back fallen tree limbs and vines to gaze into caves chiselled nearly a thousand years ago by handfuls of monks and devotees. It was hard to believe that

just hours away was the bustling, bursting city of Chongqing with its 30 million inhabitants.

Two stops showcased the role Chongqing had played as China's wartime capital during the Japanese occupation of China – a story that kept us on the edge of our bus seats as told by our local guide who had taken the day off from his normal job teaching history. First stop was the Stilwell Museum. Housed in the former residence of General Joseph W Stilwell, the US Army's head of wartime operations in China, the museum featured the general's unusual military career and lasting bond with China.

Half a kilometre away was our second stop, a museum honouring the 'Flying Tigers' – the nickname given the group of pilots from the United States Army Air, Navy and Marine Corps, recruited under presidential authority and commanded by Claire Lee Chennault to fight the aerial war against the Japanese in China. To our surprise, this informal museum also housed an art shop and about half of us left jubilantly carrying hand-painted scrolls by local artists.

While we dug into our Starbucks-packed lunches, a bullet train whisked us back to Chengdu where we were overpowered by a private visit and tasting tour of the Shuijingfang distillery, followed by a visit to the archaeological site of Jinsha and the Wuhou Temple, the shrine to the heroes who made the Shu kingdom legendary during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). The classic novel *Tale of Three Kingdoms* had been required pre-trip reading and the subject of on-the-bus quizzes as we bounced around southwest China.

This was one more stop in the string of China's most famous sites that FOM groups have visited over the past years, ranging from Kashgar and the Silk Road caves of Dunhuang, to the Xumishan, Yungang and Longmen Buddhist Grottoes of central China, to Kublai Khan's recently discovered Xanadu, Famensi's secret crypt with its Tang dynasty treasures, and the pulse-stopping Hanging Temple of Mount Hengshan. May we never grow tired of such journeys.

The tour leader, **Patricia Bjaaland Welch**, was accompanied by Lynn Baker, Alexandra Domart, Susan Sim, Coleen and Scott Singer, Tan Yew Cheng, Premoj and Sajeeve Thomas, Abha Kaul, Mary Rajkumar, Ellen Rosenkranz, Isabelle Dutreux, Ami Jobanputra, Sara Brown and Liisa Wihman.

Photos by Lynn Baker

Study Tour to Northern Laos

By Gisella Harrold



Giving alms, receiving alms

I have visited Laos a few times and each time have been amazed at how the country has managed to maintain so much of its unique culture and traditions, which seem to disappear so quickly in many neighbouring countries. This was one of the reasons why I joined this FOM trip, held in October 2016 and organised by Helen Cannon-Brookes and Sue Ellen Kelso, two experienced FOM travellers and trip organisers.

Laos has much to offer: Vientiane the quiet and undervalued capital city; Luang Prabang which was once the capital and is now home to one of the most revered icons of Laos; the green countryside still largely untouched by mass tourism. During this FOM trip we explored many new areas in remote areas of Laos as well as some of the famous historical sites. It is almost impossible to describe all of the wonderful things we managed to see during the short week we spent there.

The roots of today's Laos can be traced back to the 14th century, when King Fa Ngum founded the Kingdom of Lan Xang Hom Khao, the 'Land of a Million Elephants with a White Umbrella', which is a symbol in many temples even today. In 1560 the capital was moved to Vientiane, where we went to see Pha That Luang, the 'Great Stupa', the national



Group photo taken in the Plain of Jars

symbol of Laos. There are many legends regarding this stupa – that Ashoka sent a Buddhist reliquary in the fourth century BCE and that it was a sacred area to the Mons, but what is certain is that the current structure was built in the 16th century, was badly damaged during the many wars fought with neighbours and eventually reconstructed in 1930. When we went to see it, it was again under renovation.

A visit to Wat Si Saket is just as much a 'must' as a visit to Pha That. This is the only temple in Laos that survived the Siamese occupation in the 17th century and is famous for its vast number of Buddhas. It is said to house over 5,000, including a little cabinet for 'broken' Buddhas, since these cannot simply be disposed of, they find a dignified resting place in this temple.

One of my personal highlights, even though it was very sad, was our visit to COPE, an abbreviation of 'Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise' a local NGO, founded in 1997 to provide help for the many victims of cluster and other bombs. Until this visit I had not realised that in the 60s and 70s over two million tons of explosives were dropped on Laos. This makes Laos the most bombed country on earth. It is estimated that over 30% of the explosives didn't detonate and are still around. They are therefore a constant threat to the population.

The next stop was another highlight – Muang La Lodge on the banks of the Nam Pak River, in the northern province of Oudomxai. Eight years ago, a French-Laotian couple set out to create this lovely place where the clocks are turned back. They utilised a natural hot spring for the spa and the products of the local markets are used for an excellent local cuisine.

For two days, we explored the surrounding mountains and had the opportunity to visit different ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, Mon, Khmu and Akha. Laos is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Southeast Asia, owing mainly to its 'crossroads' location as a landlocked country. According to the 1995 census, Laos recognises 149 ethnic groups, with 47 main ethnicities and a total of 82 distinct



Dignified resting place for broken Buddhas



Having a go at the Ipok Puppets

living languages. Each group has retained its own unique style of building, food, religion and clothes, and we could see the differences as soon as we entered the villages. In one, we discovered that there are very interesting ways of getting the necessary protein. A group of men had caught some rats and were happily preparing these to be sold in the local market. Although we found this fascinating, we declined to find out how rat would actually taste.

We soon discovered that not everything was picturesque. The remoteness of the villages, the hardship of agricultural life and the lure of the big city are evident here. The majority of the people here are the very young and the very old. Almost everyone else has left. In addition to this, drug abuse, low attendance at schools and early marriages, which result in early childbirth, are a big problem. Villages that have addressed these issues are considered “model villages” and this is proudly announced at the village entrance.

One that we visited was an Akha hill tribe’s. The Akha still follow an animistic religion with elements of ancestor worship. Wooden gates, called ‘spirit gates’ mark the entrance to the village, to ward off evil and invite good spirits. Akha women are known for their talent in weaving and for their embroidery skills, but the headdress is the most notable. It immediately reveals the wearer’s social status in the family, through the embroidery, silver coins, fur and feathers.

Yet another highlight was our visit to the Plain of Jars on the Xieng Khoung Plateau. There are three major sites and great care needs to be taken to stay on the designated footpath, as not all the area has been cleared of landmines. No one really knows why the jars are there or even how they got there since there are no rocks or quarries close by. The stories about the creation of the jars include aliens, giants and the suggestion that they were gigantic wine or water containers for the Silk Road. However, the more likely answer is that they were some sort of burial container, this is also supported by the fact that there are different size



All sorts of food at the local market

containers, created at different times. The period of creation is thought to have been from 500BCE to 500CE.

A six-hour journey over the hills took us to our last city, Luang Prabang, a beautiful little town along the Mekong. This World Heritage Site still has markets with interesting local food such as dried river weeds, fruit, bugs and even bats. If you get up early in the morning you can see monks in saffron robes accepting offerings from locals and tourists alike. Here you can find the most sacred Buddha image of Laos, the Phra Bang, which gave the city its name.

At Wat Xieng Thong Temple a special treat awaited us, a private ceremony with the Ipok puppets, traditionally used to entertain the Lao royal family. A priest prepares a small offering of food and drink for the puppets before they are ready to perform. The performance that followed told us stories about local life and was so special that some of the monks joined us. Afterwards the puppet master showed us how to use the puppets



Only the young and the old are left in the villages

correctly and then the puppets went back into their boxes. We went down to the river and a boat ride that took us to Pak Ou, a pair of natural caves where over the last centuries Buddhists have brought thousands of Buddhas. Although a lot have disappeared in recent years and are now most likely in private collections, many are still there and make this cave a magical place.

There are many more things to be explored and discovered and I recommend a visit to this wonderful Land of a Million Elephants, whether with or without Friends of the Museums.

Gisella Harrold has lived in Singapore for over 20 years and combines her love of travelling and photography by following as many FOM study tours as time permits.

All photos by the author

Sikkim's Sacred Landscape

By Anne Sandlund



Sikkim's contrasts - bamboo frames the distant peaks of the Kangchendzonga Range

In the eighth century, Guru Rinpoche arrived in Sikkim and recognised it as a sacred and special land. He meditated, prayed, walked, flew and hid *termas* (hidden treasures or sacred teachings) in various locations, knowing the world then was not ready for these spiritual truths, but that they would be found and revealed in later centuries. He also appointed Sikkim's guardian deities, including Dzonga, who lives on Mount Kangchendzonga and is Sikkim's owner of the land. Thus is Sikkim known in Himalayan Buddhism as a *beyul*, or sacred, hidden land.

Our FOM travellers arrived in Sikkim last November under circumstances far more prosaic than those of Guru Rinpoche. We landed in Delhi in the full press of confusion and mayhem initiated by Modi's abrupt crackdown on India's black market currency. Overnight, old 1,000 and 500 rupee notes were no longer valid and had to be deposited or exchanged for smaller denominations. We faced long lines as bank branches and ATMs ran out of useable cash. After flying to Bagdogra, we undertook a long, winding drive to Rangpo, the checkpoint entry into Sikkim, bumping along in a sad-looking, low-slung tourist bus with little shock absorbency to protect against rutted roads. Sore backs, sore glutes, aching heads and upset and or hungry stomachs threatened our travellers' happy spirit of adventure during this hectic arrival into Sikkim.

Our bedraggled group met our hosts at Rangpo in a sorry state. But we could not be grumbly for long as the lovely Hope Leezum and her colleague, Pintso, deftly arranged for tea and biscuits to be served while our passports were checked and stamped. They listened, joked, smiled, and with a few phone calls rearranged our transport and also assured us that our currency exchange worries would be addressed. Thus we entered the magical land of Sikkim. The everyday worries and cares we brought with us gradually faded as we absorbed its natural beauty and spiritual wonders. Some very special people –



Waving prayer flags frame Dubdi Monastery in Yoksam

Hope (also called Semla, which means princess), her husband Yapla, Pintso and Dikila – guided this journey.

The winding, mountainous landscape of Sikkim unfolded, wrapping itself around us as we drove, drove some more, and then hiked to explore its sacred sites, almost always in the gleaming white presence of Mt Kangchendzonga, the world's third tallest peak. Throughout Sikkim, the enthusiasm of the people we met, whether schoolchildren, monks or farmers, was infectious. As we travelled farther west into Sikkim, we understood better its hidden aspect. The difficult roads that wound around steep mountains heightened the power and drama of still-isolated temples and villages. Cardamom fields clung to steep hillsides, and barley and millet fields were carved as patchwork terraces. Deep scars running down mountainsides reminded us that landslides were a common occurrence.

In Gangtok, highlights included a charming hotel with views over Gangtok, a morning hike through a vast zoo and a talk with its passionate chief veterinarian. We drank cocktails under the stars and also the clouds, thus missing the 70-year moon magic at its zenith. Dr Anna Balikci spoke about the recent naming of Kangchendzonga National Park as both a natural and cultural World Heritage Site. We walked through the Sunday market and later enjoyed passionfruit cocktails at Hope and Yapla's peaceful home. We were mesmerised by Tsuklakhang, the royal chapel, and its beautifully restored wall paintings and also enjoyed seeing the young monks in the monastic school. A funicular ride took us to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology where we viewed an extensive collection of Buddhist texts and historical photos.

On the drive to Yoksam, we visited the Buddha Park Museum, where a Bollywood movie was being filmed. At a nearby restaurant, we ate a delicious lunch of Sikkimese specialties and drank *chang*, fermented millet, from bamboo mugs. For many, the day's highlight was Tashiding Monastery, a powerful, spiritual place perched high on a mountain. We arrived late, when the setting sun and growing



Agile red panda at the Himalayan Zoological Park in Gangtok



The snow-white chortens of Tashiding gleam in the dusk

shadows heightened Tashiding's mystery and majesty. Guru Rinpoche first identified Tashiding as a spiritual site and Buddhist legend holds that its Drakar Rock provides entry to another hidden land. Brilliant white *chortens* mark the burial sites of Sikkim's spiritual and earthly leaders. We walked past beautifully chiselled and painted Buddhist tablets and carved *om mani padme hum* rocks, created over many years by a resident monk, Yanchong Lodil, who came to Sikkim with the Dalai Lama when he fled Tibet. It is said that the Dalai Lama urged him to stay at Tashiding and carve spiritual offerings for pilgrims, as he wished to atone for past sins.

Yoksam is the gathering point for those going on treks into Kangchendzonga National Park and is surrounded by alpine beauty. While there, monks from all over the Himalayas were attending the funeral of Yang Thang Rinpoche, who had recently died. He was the most recent reincarnate of Latsen Chenpo, one of the three lamas who crowned the first *Chogyal* (king) of Sikkim in Yoksam. Such was his piety and holiness that his followers did not pray for him, but prayed for the revelation of his reincarnation. We toured Dubdi Monastery, the oldest in Sikkim, and then visited the original coronation site where the first *Chogyal* was crowned in 1642. Our walks included informal botany lessons if you were near Pintso or Yapla. They identified cardamom plants and how they were grown, a local tree whose leaves were used as food containers, and a bush, *data* to locals, used to treat nosebleeds and to make rope and string. We crossed bubbling streams and in one, the stream's waters turned a *mani* (prayer) wheel.

We drove farther into western Sikkim, where sections of the roads had recently been gutted by landslides, and in other sections, we beheld rushing waterfalls. Our destination was a bucolic farm stay in Rinchenpong. There we hiked among rhododendrons, gnarled trees and bamboo and witnessed more stunning Himalayan views. We competed in lawn darts, made bonfires, sang around them into the night, and feasted on home-grown Sikkimese dishes. At an organic farm, built on a steep mountainside, we admired the owner's ingenuity and sampled the farm's 'poison' honey, a local remedy for illness. We hiked to Rinchenpong Gompa and then to the 300-year-old Rigsum Gompa. There, monks were busy painting, putting up welcome tents and flags, and hanging ropes of marigolds for a visiting Rinpoche. The altar



United in adventure - FOM travellers with Semla and Dikila



Charming cottage at the Rinchenpong farm stay

statuary and wall murals inside the temple impressed us.

Leaving Rinchenpong, we took a hike with a 'shortcut' and four hours later arrived to meet the waiting cars. Led by Yapla, this adventure through golden fields and along streams was another highlight. In Pelling, we stayed at a picturesque hotel with views of Kangchendzonga and the entire range. A shorter hike, no shortcuts this time, took us to Rabdentse Palace Ruins, a location with stunning scenery, but also an example of what not to do in cultural restoration, as the recreated rooms defied logic. When we visited Sikkim's oldest monastery, Sangachoeling, the colourfully dressed Buddhist pilgrims, who were friendly and patient with our numerous photo requests, enchanted us.

And finally to Darjeeling, a former colonial hill station and tea-growing centre. There we stayed at the Windamere Hotel, where it feels as if time has stood still and the British Raj is a present reality. We rode the Toy Train, shopped for shawls, bangles, books and Buddhas, and of course sampled Darjeeling tea. Cognizant that our time together was soon ending, we enjoyed our own good company and laughed our way through the many-course meals at the Windamere.



Ropes of marigolds to welcome a Rinpoche

The group and our Sikkimese hosts continue to share thoughts, pictures, jokes and greetings on WhatsApp three months after the trip's end. Throughout the long thread, common themes emerged, including many "I miss the mountains" "Semla, Yapla, Dikila and Pintso, you were such gracious hosts, thank you!" "It's 5:00 pm somewhere!" and "Where are the hiking shortcuts?" The shared pictures included Pintso's new baby daughter and the wagers we had made as to the date of her birth.

Renewal, reinvigoration, Himalayan bonfire songs and long walks with longer shortcuts – sacred Sikkim has it all. An FOM Study Tour implies personal discovery and new insights into the world; it is a treasured gift when that journey is led by and shared with such fine travel companions.

Anne Sandlund worked and lived in Hong Kong and Singapore for more than 25 years. She currently lives in San Francisco.

Photos by Andra Leo

The Katu Handweaving of South Laos

By Linda S McIntosh

Little has been published about the hand-woven cloths of ethnic groups living in Laos, especially the peoples who have historically lived in the watersheds of the Annamite Cordillera. The Katu, also spelt Cotu, is one of these groups, and settlements are found on both sides of this mountain chain, one that forms an international border between Laos and Vietnam.² The Katu and its subgroups belong to the Khmer sub-branch, Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic ethnolinguistic family.

The Katu group shares similar cultural traits that Malayo-Polynesian ethnolinguistic groups possess, such as traditional belief systems that involve spirits inhabiting animate and inanimate objects, and the high status of a victorious fighter. Gift exchange is crucial during life transitions, especially marriage and death. A bride's family, known as the wife-givers, provides food, textiles and other goods to the groom's party or the wife-takers. The latter is obligated to provide water buffalo and imported goods, such as metal gongs and pots, porcelain and beads, as gifts to the former. During funerals, the deceased's relatives bring textiles to shroud the body. Some of the family wealth, such as metal and porcelain, is placed at the gravesite.

Gender plays important roles in Katu traditional society. In the past, males protected the community. They also hunted to provide nourishment for their families and settlements. Regarding handicrafts, men interlace bamboo and rattan to create baskets and traps. Women are responsible for maintaining their households, such as cooking and cleaning, and producing textiles to serve as clothing, gifts of exchange and ritual items.

Katu textiles are distinct because of the inclusion of beads in the structure of the fabrics. In the past, the status and wealth of a weaver's family in her community was reflected by the number of beads woven into her creations. Lead beads were the most precious type, followed by glass ones. Along with pre-dyed and synthetic threads, plastic beads have also been incorporated into weavings, but many weavers prefer



Fig 1. Mone Jouymony demonstrating her skill at her foot-braced loom, for TEG members in 2016. Photo by Digna Cruzem Ryan



Fig 2. Woman's tube skirt, handspun and trade cotton, indigo, glass beads, warp float, early 20th century, Katu, Attapeu or Sekong Province, Laos. Photo by Alain Menoni

glass to plastic. The beading may consist of a single row of patterns such as on a woman's tubular skirt (Fig 2). Or, it consists of numerous rows.

One method of creating beaded patterns is to string the beads on the thread that will become the weft of a cloth, and this thread is wound around a bobbin (shuttles are not used). When she is ready to start a pattern, she strategically places a bead between two warp threads and may continue to position other beads in the same shed. A line of beads is fixed into place by inserting a plain weft thread in the subsequent shed. Warp float technique is also utilised to form patterning (Fig 3). The method produces a wide range of motifs. More

1 The author curated an exhibit entitled "Carving a Community: The Katu People," at the Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre of Luang Prabang, Laos, in 2013. She would like to acknowledge the Centre's support and the mentorship of the exhibit's advisors. A grant from the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation funded research and the exhibit.

2 With a population of 30,000 people in Laos, the majority of the Katu reside in Salavan and Sekong Provinces. Sekong Province was established in 1986 taking land from Attapeu and Salavan Provinces. Related communities are located in Quang Nam and Thua Thien Hue Provinces of Vietnam with a population of 62,000.

research must be conducted to document their symbolism.

In 2004 I visited a Katu village, Houay Houn Tai, in Salavan Province, the birthplace of Mone Jouymony (Fig 1). Mone and I didn't meet until almost ten years later (2013) in Luang Prabang¹ in North Laos where she moved to work. Like many other Katu women, Mone and her five sisters weave on foot-braced, backstrap looms. Since opening her own business in Luang Prabang last year, she is spending more time teaching weaving classes. She also helps her sisters to sell their handwoven products.

During the second week of January 2016, Mone and I travelled to Singapore where we gave a presentation on Katu textiles to the Textile Enthusiasts Group (TEG) and Mone offered weaving lessons to interested TEG members. Naturally dyed textiles woven by her sisters were also available for sale.

International entities, such as a Japanese university and aid agency, have implemented projects focusing on the return of natural dyes and materials, mainly abaca and cotton, in Houay Houn Tai Village. Running water is not easily accessible here, making natural dyeing a challenge. A well is the villagers' primary source of water, but some weavers persevere and create naturally dyed textiles owing to the demands of the international market and because natural dyes are environmentally friendly.

Through contact with non-Katu peoples or exposure to their textiles, Katu women in Laos have been inspired to add complex borders to some examples of their lower garments. Trade relations existed between the Katu and the Lao and Phuthai. The skirts of the Lao and Phuthai, a group related to the Lao, are composed of three panels. On



Fig 3. Detail of warp float patterning of Figure 2

ceremonial Lao and Phuthai skirts, the border is decorated with supplementary weft designs. The creator of the skirt in Figure 4 added a band of patterning, emulating motifs found on her neighbours' attire.

In order to create a textile two or more metres in length, the warp is attached to a stationary object. Therefore, a foot-braced loom is not utilised to weave ceremonial cloths and men's loincloths. Composed of two or more pieces of fabric, large textiles are hung in the interior of a communal house or another ritual structure for ceremonies and inside a residence for rites of passage, such as weddings. Clothing belonging to both sexes joins the display that beckons ancestors and other spirits to join the activities. A large textile is sometimes used as a blanket, and a man wears one that is folded lengthwise several times and placed diagonally across the upper body for rites (Fig 5). Some Katu men continue to don loincloths for festivals and other important occasions.

Handwoven textiles have become the ethnic identity markers of the Katu. Many women continue to weave despite the availability of factory-made clothing and handwoven textiles produced by other groups in Laos. They are able to earn an income through sales, thus providing for their households.



Fig 5. A Katu man demonstrating how to wear traditional attire, Sekong Province, Laos, 2013. Photo by Kees Sprengers for the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre



Fig 4. Woman's tube skirt, cotton, warp float, early-mid 20th century, Katu, Attapeu or Sekong Province, Laos. Photo by Alain Menoni

Linda S McIntosh received her doctorate from Simon Fraser University, Canada. Currently, she is an independent researcher based in Luang Prabang, Laos, where she continues to study the cultures, including textiles, of the country's diverse population.

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Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

Explore Singapore!

To register for an ES! event, please sign up on-line at FOM.sg or register at the ES! table at any Monday Morning Lecture in the Asian Civilisations Museum. For more details on ES! programmes, please refer to *FOMflash* and the FOM website.



Where the Faithful Gather to Prostrate

Thursday 2 March
9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Fee: \$35

Join us on this bus tour of some of Singapore's significant mosques and learn about their history.



Kampungs in the Sky

Thursday 9 March
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$30

HDB (Housing Development Board) estates are all around us, but we know very little about this major success story of Singapore. Come and discover how this was achieved in a very short time frame.



An Introduction to Chinese Calligraphy

Thursday 23 March
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$30

Join us for an introductory session on Chinese calligraphy. Learn about the techniques and materials used and the nature of Chinese written script.



STPI and Workshop

Thursday 30 March
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$30

Would you like to try your hands at something new? Come with Explore Singapore! to a print-making workshop at STPI and try a stencil or a mono print.



Tour of Esplanade - Theatres by the Bay

Thursday 20 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$40

The two 'durians' alongside Marina Bay form one of Singapore's most striking landmarks. Find out about the buildings' architecture and history and how everything operates to support the performances here.



Enabling Village

Thursday 27 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$20

Come with ES! to learn about this project, located in Redhill. The Enabling Village is an inclusive community space which integrates education, training and work for people with disabilities.

Textile Enthusiasts Group

Programme: Confluence between Textiles and Painting:
Private Tour at the National Gallery Singapore

Date: Friday 3 March

Time: Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 am start

Speaker: Julie Williams

Location: National Gallery Singapore

Address: 1 Saint Andrew's Road, #01-01, 178957

Entrance Fee: Waived for FOM-TEG

RSVP: Email Digna fomtegsingapore@gmail.com

Please join us for a private tour with Julie Williams through the National Gallery Singapore. Julie is a professional artist and textile 'nut'. Her artists of influence include Matisse and Vuillard, who both painted textiles. The confluence between textiles and painting has long been a passion, one that she will share with us. Julie is a docent at the National Gallery Singapore and will show us works she feels will be of interest to us, including pieces in the permanent Southeast Asian and Singapore collections, as well as the *Artist and Empire* exhibition.

About Julie:

Julie is based in Tiong Bahru where she paints layers of history, including an iconic Peranakan beaded cloth, retro metal security gates and a nyonya wearing the *baju panjang*. Her interest in batik from Indonesia is also evident in her new work. Find out more about Julie's artwork at www.artchisg.com

About the National Gallery Singapore:

The National Gallery Singapore is a new visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Find out more about the National Gallery Singapore at www.nationalgallery.sg/about/about-the-gallery



Photo Credit: National Gallery Singapore

NEW DATE FOR SHARED PASSION

Programme: Shared Passion

Date: 14 April

Time: Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 start

Host: Janet Stride

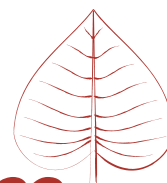
Location: TBA

RSVP: Email Janet at janetstride@gmail.com

TEG members always look forward to *Shared Passion* month. This annual show-and-tell event is an opportunity to share and learn from other members. Bring one of your favourite textiles – a piece you wear or keep as a collector's item. It would be helpful if you knew the weaving technique and provenance of your selected piece, but if you don't, you may draw upon others' knowledge. Each member will be given a chance to speak about their textile item. Please note that it is not required to bring a textile; you are welcome to attend for the learning experience.



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Sixteen Trainees Begin Docent Training at the Indian Heritage Centre

By Millie Phuah

FOM welcomed 16 trainees for the third session of docent training at the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) on 7 February. The group was diverse, with trainees from six nationalities, including nine Singaporeans, and a wide range of backgrounds, ranging from law to art. Eleven were newcomers to guiding. "It's hard to believe we started with our publicity in the August 2016 Public Information Meeting... met many applicants, and here we are already!" said one of the two Co-Heads, Jyoti Ramesh.

FOM council members including Clara Chan (president) were in attendance. So were the IHC's curatorial, programmes and operations teams. Clara welcomed the new cohort with an introduction to FOM's history and development and the new council. They also met the IHC's new general manager, Saravanan Sadanandom, who shared IHC's two goals for the year – to host more student groups and reach out more to seniors. Dorien Knaap (Overall Head of Training) gave a session on research techniques, in keeping with FOM's high training standards consistent across the museums.

Co-Head Vasanthi Ravi summed it up, "FOM opened many doors and new opportunities... I look forward to learning while sharing what I've learned. Hope the trainees get inspired too and make some friends along the way." Friends were certainly made that day, a wonderful thing to

have as one starts on the journey towards 'docent-hood'. And for every trainee, it is a journey never undertaken alone.

Docent training opportunities are available several times a year at the various museums. For more information on the next sessions, do join us for the FOM Public Information Meeting on 16 May to be held at the Gallery Theatre, NMS.




Trainees all set to go. Also in the picture – co-heads, group leaders, FOM council members and IHC staff

Millie Phuah is coordinator at the IHC and guides at three heritage institutions – the IHC, the Malay Heritage Centre and the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall.

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Asian Film Study Groups

Are you an avid cinema lover who does not know where to start with good Asian films? Want to meet like-minded individuals and watch films together? Come to our screenings.

There are two Asian Film Study Groups to join. The groups meet weekly to view both classic and new films with Asian themes or by Asian directors. Besides viewing them, we also discuss the various aspects of storytelling, cinematography, editing, script etc. We go to private screenings, on field trips and meet award-winning directors over pots of coffee and sometimes even wine.

Asian Film Study Group 1: Introduction - The Masters and their Masterpieces

The 10-12 FOM members' Intro Group meets every Wednesday and watches films by legendary Asian film-makers. Each member researches and delivers a short five-minute introductory presentation about the film. We then discuss the films during subsequent meetings. Classics directed by Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray and Zhang Yimou will be screened and studied in this group.

Asian Film Study Group 2: This is for those who've already undertaken the Intro Group. Every Tuesday we study a variety of films from all over Asia including China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

Know Your Director:



Akira Kurosawa's films are experiences to be cherished and masterclasses in cinematic composition. He took tones and textures of life that were wildly different and made masterpieces out of them.



Satyajit Ray's films depict a fine sensitivity without using melodrama or dramatic excesses. He evolved a cinematic style that is almost invisible. He believed, "The best technique is the one that's not noticeable".



One of Zhang Yimou's recurrent themes is the resilience of Chinese people in the face of hardship and adversity. His films are particularly noted for their rich use of colour.

Registration open for March session
Visit us at www.fom.sg/activities/asian-film-groups
Contact Neeraja Rao (neerajaarun@yahoo.com)



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Japanese Docents

In Memory of Yoko Kawaguchi

When I heard that Yoko had passed away on 27 November 2016, I could not believe it because she did not tell us about her illness. When she left our guiding group a few years ago, I was shocked and lost for words. I never thought she would leave our group. It could have been because of the illness, but we do not know.

She joined FOM in October 2005 about the same time as I did. She was quiet, but worked very hard to be a good guide. We practised together and also organised the Japanese Fair to introduce our culture *Four Seasons* to other friends of FOM. She was a diligent and smart person.

After the renovation and expansion of the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) in 2006 she became a representative of the Japanese docent group at the museum. The senior guide found her very capable as she led us on new journeys of guiding at NMS. She was a guide not only at NMS and SAM, but also at ACM and TPM. Later she became a coordinator and stayed on the committee for quite a long while to help other leaders in our Japanese docent group. She was a very committed person and dedicated her life to guiding. She not only performed her guiding duties, but also helped in the museum exhibitions.



Left: Yoko Kawaguchi
Right: Yoshie Osawa

One of these was for the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall's special exhibition, which was about Japanese supporters of Sun Yat Sen. She praised our Japanese

volunteer guides for helping at the exhibition. We did some research and translated most of the captions so Japanese visitors could understand. Though it was a very tiring job, it was rewarding to learn about Sun Yat Sen's Japanese supporters during those turbulent times. There were many touching stories.



Left to right: Kenta Kawaguchi, Clara Chan and Mr Seizaburo Kawaguchi

One particular story was in Umeya Shokichi's movie. He was a big supporter of Sun Yat Sen and made a movie after recording the Chinese revolution. Yoko led us well and made this exhibition successful. She also helped out at the Philatelic Museum's *Traditional Japanese Dolls* exhibition. I have fond memories of Yoko wearing the kimono. We shared so many memories that I could not possibly write everything.

Lastly, we deeply appreciate her \$5,000 donation to FOM. I knew that she loved museums and had many friends here. We pray that she will rest in peace. We offer our deepest condolences to her husband, Mr Seizaburo Kawaguchi, and her son Kenta, who kindly came to deliver her donation.

Yoshie Osawa, Japanese Docent

The JDs start their training programmes twice a year, in April and in October. Last October, 13 trainees joined JD and are currently doing their mentor tours. Here's a message from one of these trainees, Mayumi Nishihara. Please join us in welcoming them to the FOM community.

Since I moved here in April 2012 with my family, I have met various JDs who all seem to be proud and content. Also, the more I learned about Singapore, the more my respect towards this country grew. Finally, I joined the training programme with 12 wonderful fellow trainees last October.

Through my work with JICA (the Japan International Cooperation Agency) and UNESCO, I have lived in many countries, including Kenya, Zambia, Pakistan and China. There, I witnessed discrimination in the areas of racial, religious, ideological or gender differences. They often caused conflicts and wars and innocent people were the first to suffer. Deep down, I have been searching for ways we can live harmoniously, beyond our differences.

At the National Museum of Singapore, I was very moved by Mr Lee Kuan Yew's inspiring speech, *A Moment of Anguish*. "... We are going to have a multi-racial nation in



Singapore. We will set an example. Everybody will have his place. Let us be real Singaporeans. We unite regardless of race, language, religion, culture." Now the rest of the world can surely learn important lessons from Singapore. As a JD, I hope to make a difference by sharing Singapore's history and achievements with our visitors.

Mayumi Nishihara, Japanese Docent Trainee

Monday Morning Lectures

Free public lectures are held in the auditorium of the Asian Civilisations Museum on Mondays. Everyone is welcome to arrive at 10:30 am for coffee or tea before the lecture, which begins promptly at 11:00 am. For safety and fire hazard reasons, there may be times when we cannot admit all those who wish to attend our lectures. Please take your seat early to avoid disappointment.



6 March • Following in the Buddha's Footsteps

Speaker: Pia Rampal

The Buddha told his faithful follower, "Ananda there are four places for those who are confidently treading on the path of *dharma* to visit, which may further inspire them".

Join Pia as she visits the places where the Buddha was born, gained enlightenment, first taught and attained Nirvana...and discover, that indeed, there is something very special there.



13 March • Penang Heritage Food and the Nonya Heritage Kitchen

Speaker: Dr Ong Jin Teong

Dr Ong Jin Teong will talk about Penang heritage food from a Nonya/Baba perspective. The predominantly Malay and Hokkien influences on Penang heritage food will be mentioned and also the South Indian and Thai

influences. The latter two distinguish Penang food from the Nyonya food found in Melaka and Singapore. He will also provide insights into the Thai, Hainanese and English influences on Penang heritage food and explain the background to and origins of traditional Nyonya dishes. The talk will be illustrated with interesting old photographs of food, family members and friends, and the traditional utensils used for cooking.



20 March • Classic Chinese Paintings Revisited

Speaker: Mrs Tan Shook Fong

In the last two years, the art scene in Singapore has grown by leaps and bounds.

Recently we celebrated the fifth edition of the Singapore Biennale. We now have contemporary art talks, interviews with contemporary artists, contemporary art workshops and contemporary art publications. With so much attention on this, we have almost forgotten the magnificent Chinese paintings of yore. For this lecture, the speaker Tan Shook Fong has selected some famous classical Chinese brush paintings to refresh the audience's memory. She will also introduce the artists behind these works. The selected paintings will showcase the different genres of ink and brush painting, covering the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.

27 March • Painted Stories

Speaker: Marina Thayil

Art in India serves the purposes of life. It was never art for art's sake, but was always created in response to demand. It was not love of art, but a love of life that was expressed in



this incredible aesthetic tradition from early civilisations to modern times. This lecture provides a glimpse into the world of Indian paintings on walls, cloth, palm-leaf and paper and the stories they tell about gods and kings, artists and patrons, lovers and thieves.



3 April • Fort Canning Hill: Exploring Singapore's Heritage and Nature

Speakers: Melissa Diagona and Jyoti Angresh

In many ways, the story of Fort Canning Hill parallels the transformation of Singapore from a small trading town into today's vibrant, cosmopolitan city. From 14th century gold jewellery to 19th century paintings to 21st century sketches, from stone bas-reliefs to the ASEAN sculpture garden to temporary art installations, all manner of art relating to Fort Canning Hill can be found and help to tell its captivating story. Jyoti and Melissa fell in love with history and plant-filled Fort Canning Hill during their frequent outings there, and decided that only by writing a book could they satisfy their curiosity and shine a light upon this wonderful place.



10 April • Singapore Social Histories that You Won't Find in the Books

Speakers: Ann Wee with Mandakini Arora

A 'tiger' remembers. Ann Wee shares her observations of Singapore gleaned from 66 years of living and working here. Ann was born in England in 1926 (the year of the Fire Tiger) but is, as Janadas Devan says in the foreword to Ann's book, "made in Singapore". Her micro-histories, engagingly told, bring colour and depth to Singapore's past.

17 April • NO TALK (EASTER)



24 April • Ancient Kashmir's Multi-Cultural Legacy

Speaker: Tara Dhar Hasnain

In this talk, Tara will explore the strong links ancient Kashmir had with Gandhara, Central Asia, even China and Tibet/Ladakh. This led to (or resulted in) its syncretic culture and heritage, shaped by a confluence of Buddhism, Hinduism and the tolerant Sufi version of Islam. See rare pictures of ancient archaeological sites, especially from the first millennium, such as the venue of the Fourth Buddhist Council, Hindu temple structures that show Graeco-Hellenic influences and old Sufi shrines from the time Islam arrived in this fabled land.

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Tues to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

Understanding Asia through Singapore

The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world. The new and refreshed permanent galleries are arranged along broad themes that highlight cross-cultural connections, rather than being segmented by geography or culture.

The ACM connects the cultures of Asia across two broad themes: trade and the exchange of ideas, faith and belief. Beginning with the ninth century Tang shipwreck, the galleries explore Southeast Asia as a trading hub. Chinese porcelain, Southeast Asian ceramics, Indian textiles and furniture are showcased along with the Asian luxuries that were in demand in the global market. Asia was also a source as well as a crossroads of faith and belief and the ACM galleries display works of art showing the development of ancient Indian faiths and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. Christianity and Islam in Asia reveal the Asian origin and evolution of these global faiths.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com



A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages online for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour
Sat 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour
To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

LOCK ROUTE

Various locations around Gillman Barracks
Open 24 hours to the public
(Through June)

LOCK ROUTE, a public art showcase takes inspiration from Gillman Barracks' address and the route march army recruits typically undergo during their training. Situated outdoors, it features 16 arresting outdoor artworks by world-renowned and emerging international and Singapore artists, including several new commissions. The artworks consist of site-specific installations, sculptures and murals, and visitors are invited to traverse the grounds of Gillman Barracks and experience a closer encounter with art out in the open.

The Making of an Institution

NTU CCA
(Through May)

The exhibition captures different moments in the development of the CCA, connecting artistic projects, discursive manifestations and the institutional apparatus, in a seamless display. The exhibition is curated by Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director, Anna Lovocchio, Curator, Residencies, and Anca Rujoiu, Manager, Publications.

Free general admission to all NHB museums for FOM members and one guest.

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg

Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.
Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri: 11:00 am and 2:00 pm

The Indian Heritage Centre's permanent gallery's storyline revolves around five themes, arranged chronologically to span the period from the first to the 21st century. The themes present the early interactions of South Asia with Southeast Asia. The museum also narrates the history of the Indian migrant community and its contributions to Singapore.

Once Upon a Time in Little India (Through 21 July)

Once Upon a Time in Little India tells the story of Singapore's Little India through historical and contemporary lenses and draws parallels with diasporic settlements across the globe. Recreating moments past and present, this exhibition presents an appealing and arresting mix of historical artefacts and contemporary art installations. This exhibition is a parallel project of the Singapore Biennale, 2016.

Malay Heritage Centre

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays
FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am;
Sat and Sun: 12:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s (Through June)

The Malay Heritage Centre's fifth special exhibition, *Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s* affirms the importance of language to a community by tracing the development of Malay modernity and identity through print, advertisements and editorial cartoons. Gain insights into how the Malay community in Singapore used the power of the mass media to discuss and respond to historical events such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the nationalist movements that swept across Southeast Asia afterwards.

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

The Singapore History Gallery

In celebration of 50 years of independence, this gallery has been refreshed with updated stories and content on Singapore's history, capturing the nation's defining moments, challenges and achievements from its earliest beginnings 700 years ago, to the independent, modern city-state it is today.

Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between desire and danger at this stimulating new exhibition at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. Featuring creatures that arouse appetites and instill fear, and exotic plants sought for their ability to induce pleasure or pain, this selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

Museum Information and Exhibitions

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore
119279

Tel: 6516 8817

www.nus.edu.sg/museum

Free admission



Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays

Guided tours:

Tues to Fri (by appointment), Sat 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm (selected exhibitions only – phone for details)

1+1=1

Ng Eng Teng

Through the motifs of spacing and difference, this exhibition features works by the artist Ng Eng Teng produced between 1958 and 2001. The title of the exhibition takes as its point of reference a series of sculptures developed by the artist during the 1990s. While the series *1+1=1* has not been seen as characteristic of Ng Eng Teng's practice, here it is proposed as an alternative point of entry into the artist's body of works. Practising since the 1960s, Ng Eng Teng was, up until his death in 2001, an artist working across the disciplines of painting, drawing, ceramics and sculpture. His works have been exhibited internationally in Singapore, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan and Australia, among others. His most recent work, *The Last Masterpiece*, was completed posthumously and is presented as part of this exhibition.

"There are too many episodes of people coming here..."

(Through July)

This exhibition builds on the previous exhibition's interest in the textuality of exhibitions, bringing in materials by artists Charles Lim, Dennis Tan and Zai Kuning as a means to rewrite and open up newer points of departure. The exhibition title is based on the words of Wak Ali, the custodian of a Muslim shrine that once stood on the banks of the Kallang River. It is at once an affirmation and a lament about the potentials of a site that may transform the individual regard and the very contingency of positions on immediate experiences and commitments.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883

Tel: 6227 5731

www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba

Baba House is a heritage house dating back to the early 20th century. It exhibits the Peranakan community's material culture in a domestic context. Visits are by appointment only owing to conservation concerns. Please sign up in advance for free heritage tours which are offered on Mon 2:00pm, Tues 2:00pm & 6:30pm, Thurs 10:00am & Sat 11:00am.

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941

Tel: 6332 7591

www.peranakanmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese), every second Wednesday of the month 10:45 am (French).

This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans.

Nyonya Beadwork and Embroidery: Craft and Heritage

(Through 26 March)

FOM Guided Tours:

Wed & Fri 12:30 pm (English)

Tues to Friday 11:30 am (Japanese)

This exhibition explores the art of embroidery with glass beads, silk and gold produced by and for Peranakans. The cosmopolitan nature of this rich artistic tradition will be revealed, recovering a history never fully recorded. The familiar look of the beaded slippers, purses, bed hangings, and embroidered handkerchiefs and kebayas of the Peranakan communities of Southeast Asia, is the result of diverse Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and local Malay influences. The exhibition is curated by Dr Cheah Hwei-Fen, of the Australian National University.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555

Tel: 6332 3222

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Fri 10:00 am – 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm

(English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese)

Once Upon This Island (permanent)

SAM's Learning Galleries showcase a series of contemporary works by Singaporean artists from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection as well as commissioned works. The exhibition navigates the ideas of home, community, identity and memory.

STPI

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236

Tel: 6336 3663

www.stpi.com.sg



Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00

am – 6:00 pm

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Tues and Thurs, 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes.

Collaborations

(Through April)

A blockbuster exhibition consisting of STPI's first collective collaboration with four luminary international artists: Carsten Höller, Tobias Rehberger, Anri Sala and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Over the past year, the artists jointly produced a body of work based on the children's game *Exquisite Corpse* – a device the Surrealists adopted to engineer free association. Confronting elements of surprise and the unconscious, the artists and the STPI Creative Workshop team captured the essence of collaboration while putting print and papermaking techniques to the test to produce highly whimsical and unparalleled works.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874

Tel: 6256 7377

www.wanqingyuan.org.sg



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Closed

on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 2:00 pm (English)

One Night in Wuchang: 1911 Revolution and Nanyang (Through 30 April)

FOM guided tours: Fri at 10:30 (English)

This special exhibition provides insights into the historical significance of that one night in Wuchang in October 1911 and the social impact on Chinese society, as well as the Singapore Chinese community's response.

International Antiques Fair

國際古玩展

香港會議展覽中心 - 展覽廳5BC

Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre - Hall 5BC

2017/5/26 - 30



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